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# The Year of Jubilee is at Hand: A Call for Social Justice

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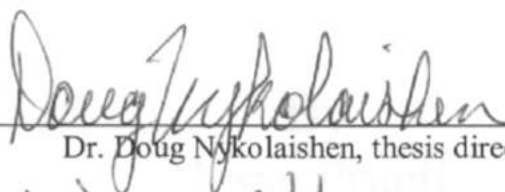
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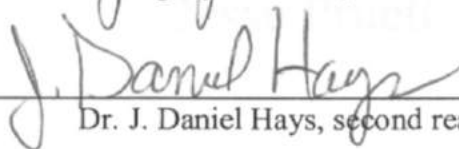
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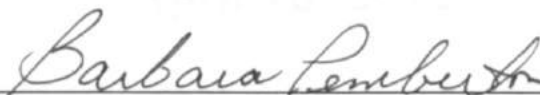
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Ouachita Baptist University

The Year of Jubilee is at Hand  
A Call for Social Justice

Senior Honors Thesis

By  
Jesse Pruett

April 16, 2012

## Introduction

In recent months, the campaign “Kony 2012” has captured the focus of millions across the globe. Using social media and an immensely popular YouTube clip, the creators of this campaign are seeking to raise awareness about alleged social injustices committed by Joseph Kony in West Africa. The fact that this campaign, among numerous other campaigns that seek to raise awareness about or to fight some form of injustice, became popular in such a short period of time illustrates the growing interest of millions of people, specifically contemporary westerners, in matters of social injustice and oppression. This growing interest in the issue of social justice has led many among the Christian community to scour the pages of Scripture in order to discover what the Bible says about injustice and how the people of God are to handle these issues.

Though the Bible is clear in its demands against injustice, the issues and themes it raises are numerous, and the task of developing a complete Biblical theology of social justice is an immense undertaking. This paper seeks to focus on one particular theme within the Biblical discussion of social justice: the year of Jubilee, and its development through three critical texts: Leviticus 25, Isaiah 61, and Luke 4:14-30. The study of each text will begin with an exegesis of the text, followed, except in the case of Leviticus, by an examination of how each text develops the earlier text or texts with respect to the theme of Jubilee, and will conclude with a summary of what each text teaches about social justice. In the end, the goal of this study is to determine principles for how the people of God are to implement social justice.

## Leviticus 25

### *Context*

At this point in the Biblical narrative, the people of Israel have been freed from slavery in Egypt and have journeyed to the base of Mt. Sinai where Yahweh has been engaged in the process of establishing them as his covenant people among whom his holy presence will dwell. A large portion of this process is the institution of laws and rituals to govern the people's interactions with God and with one another in order to meet the demands for holiness required with Yahweh living in such close proximity. This becomes even more important as the people prepare to enter a land full of pagan, Canaanite influences. Much of this legal code is found within Leviticus.

A continuation of the covenant established in Exodus, Leviticus details the sacrificial system (chs. 1-7), the role of the priesthood (chs. 8-10), the necessity of ritual cleanliness and the methods for maintaining this state (chs. 11-15), the ritual of the Day of Atonement (ch. 16), and general laws for holy living (chs. 17-25). The book concludes with a series of blessings and curses that are dependent upon Israel's obedience to the covenant (ch. 26) and a final section concerning dedication offerings to Yahweh (ch. 27).<sup>1</sup>

It is within the section on general laws for holy living that Yahweh institutes various cultic feasts and festival years, one of which is the Year of Jubilee (25:8-55). This festival year occurred every fifty years and provided the average Israelite a once in a lifetime return of tribal land and release from economic slavery. With this practice, Yahweh established a method of preventing the accumulation of large amounts of land

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<sup>1</sup> J. Daniel Hays and J. Scott Duvall, *The Baker Illustrated Bible Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 81.

and slaves as a means of impeding the development of social classes and the exploitation of the poor by a class of rich landowners.<sup>2</sup> This legislation concerning the exploitation of the poor stands as one of the major passages concerning social justice within the Pentateuch.

### *Structure*

Overall, this text can be divided into six major sections: an introduction concerning the Year of Jubilee (vv. 8-22), a transition from the establishment of the Jubilee to the redemptive practices associated with this year of release (vv. 23-24), and four hypothetical examples of the types of situations in which the release of the Jubilee would apply: loss of property (vv. 25-34), economic dependence upon a kinsmen (vv. 35-38), servitude to an Israelite (vv. 39-46), and servitude to a non-Israelite (vv. 47-55). Each of these examples presents a protasis presenting a situation that results from a “brother’s” poverty, marked by a *וְ* clause (vv. 25, 35, 39, 47), followed by an apodosis proposing the solution to the kinsman’s poverty.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the text also carries a possible narrative structure as the examples of Leviticus 25:25-55 move in a pattern of increasing want and desperation regarding the situation of the Israelite in need.<sup>4</sup>

### *Introduction of the Year of Jubilee (25:8-22)*

To introduce the legislation, the divine lawgiver connects the idea of jubilee with the preceding legislation concerning the sabbatical cycles. According to the previous

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<sup>2</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 317.

<sup>3</sup> Mignon R. Jacobs, “Parameters of Justice: Ideological Challenges Regarding Persons and Practices in Leviticus 25:25-55,” *Ex Auditu* 22 (2006): 134-135.

<sup>4</sup> Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 437.

commands (vv. 1-7), the Israelites are to consecrate every seventh year as a Sabbath year of rest for the land, meaning that they were not to plant or harvest any crops during the course of that year. Instead of the usual formal harvest, each Israelite is to simply gather from what the land produced naturally for themselves and for any slaves, foreigners, or animals that were with them (vv. 6-7). They were not to stockpile, but only to gather what was necessary for food.<sup>5</sup> In essence they are to behave like the nomads they were during their desert wandering.<sup>6</sup> With this cycle set, Yahweh proceeds to establish the practice of the Year of Jubilee. Following seven sabbatical cycles (forty-nine years), a fiftieth year is consecrated (שְׁמִטָּה) as a special year of release for the inhabitants of the land (v. 10). This year is proclaimed by the blowing of a trumpet (a ram's horn, שׁוֹפָר) on the most solemn day of the Jewish calendar, the Day of Atonement, the date when Israel as a whole receives forgiveness (v. 9).<sup>7</sup> The purpose of this consecrated year is to proclaim liberty that results in the people's return to their land and to their clan (v. 10). As will be clarified later in the chapter, this proclamation of liberty and return will be explained as a remission of debts concerning land and slavery.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, this year contains restrictions similar to the sabbatical year in that the Israelites are prohibited from planting and harvesting and instructed to simply gather food from the produce of the land.<sup>9</sup> Overall, the establishment of the year of Jubilee as a part of a cycle of release from

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<sup>5</sup> John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 433-434.

<sup>6</sup> Wenham, 318.

<sup>7</sup> Hartley, 434.

<sup>8</sup> David A. Leiter, "The Year of Jubilee and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *Brethren Life and Thought* 47 (Sum-Fall 2002): 165.

<sup>9</sup> Hartley, 434.

debt was unparalleled in the realm of the Ancient Near East. Though kings, such as Hammurabi and Samsuiluna, might on occasion issue a cancellation of debts and a release of all slaves, this practice was irregular and infrequent, happening generally toward the beginning of a king's reign.<sup>10</sup>

In dealing with the year of Jubilee, there are issues with both the etymology of the term Jubilee and the chronology of the sabbatical cycles. The meaning of the term “Jubilee” (יובל) is far from clear. The most common suggestion is that the term means “ram” based on its use to designate a musical instrument (a ram's horn) in Joshua 6:4 and in Exodus 19:13.<sup>11</sup> However, Robert North argues that, with the presence of נשך (taken to mean “a trumpet blast”) preceding the term in Joshua and Exodus, the term יובל is left undetermined. Furthermore, outside of its usage in these passages, the term is always used in context with the year of Jubilee. According to North, the meaning of this term must be determined solely from the immediate context of Leviticus and is a kind of “solemn homecoming together with liberation from...economic disadvantages.”<sup>12</sup> While its exact lexical meaning might remain undetermined, the technical meaning of Jubilee is clear as an established year of release due to its appearance as a proper name in the declaratory formula **היא יובל**.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Gane, 432.

<sup>11</sup> Hartley, 434.

<sup>12</sup> Robert North, “יובל,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, 6:1-3.

<sup>13</sup> Hartley, 434.



There are also numerous issues with the exact chronology and placement of the Jubilee. Though most commentators take the legislation literally, that the year of Jubilee was the fiftieth year following the final sabbatical year of seven cycles, producing two consecutive fallow years, there appears to be certain interpretive problems with this proposal. Based on the hardship that would be caused by two consecutive fallow years,<sup>14</sup> the beginning of the year of Jubilee in the seventh month of the normal year, and the creation of an eight year sabbatical cycle (the number of years between year 49 and year 7 of the successive cycle),<sup>15</sup> a variety of proposals have been suggested. Some have claimed that the year of Jubilee was simply a utopian ideal that was never actually meant to be observed.<sup>16</sup> However, this proposal seems rather unlikely as no other portion of legal material in Leviticus acts in this way. Another proposal is that the year of Jubilee should be interpreted as a forty-nine day "leap year" that served to realign festivals with the correct harvest time, functioning in a similar manner to February 29 in contemporary calendars.<sup>17</sup> However, not only does this proposal lack textual evidence, but also a forty-nine day period would be an insufficient amount of days to align the calendars.<sup>18</sup> Also the commands prohibiting planting or harvesting would not have any real impact on a single forty-nine day period. Two final proposals seek to align the fiftieth year with another year within the forty-nine year cycle as a way of maintaining the unbroken succession of the sabbatical cycles. The first of these, proposed by Roy Gane, concludes that, based on the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Gane, 432-433.

<sup>16</sup> Hartley, 435.

<sup>17</sup> Wenham, 319.

<sup>18</sup> Hartley, 435.

assumption that the year of Jubilee is indeed a separate fallow year and that it must be separate from the forty-ninth year, the Jubilee coincides with the first year of the following sabbatical cycle. Furthermore, with the assumption that the sabbatical years begin in the fall just like the Jubilee, a triple harvest in the preceding year, promised in 25:21, is able cover for the consecutive fallow years.<sup>19</sup> Another theory, proposed by John Hartley, seeks to define the Jubilee year as a special sabbatical year at the end of the seventh cycle. Thus, the year of Jubilee is equated with the forty-ninth year of the cycle. Noting that the promise of 25:21 (the triple harvest to sustain Israel in the fallow year[s]) is used in context of a seventh year and not exclusively related to the year of Jubilee, Hartley argues that a fallow year affects parts of three harvest cycles and thus it is impossible for there to be two consecutive years of rest. He also points to the ancients' method of reckoning time, such as with the day of Pentecost in Leviticus 23:16,<sup>20</sup> and the description of the ten Jubilees of Daniel 9 as 490 years as further evidence for his proposal.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, he claims that it is also possible that the pronouncement of Jubilee on the Day of Atonement refers to a proclamation of liberty at a particular point in time within the seventh sabbatical year (the forty-ninth year).<sup>22</sup> Overall, the final option of aligning the Jubilee with the final year of the sabbatical cycle appears to best fit the sequence presented in Leviticus 25, although a literal reading might still be plausible.

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<sup>19</sup> Gane, 433-435.

<sup>20</sup> In this instance, forty-nine exact days are counted as fifty days.

<sup>21</sup> Hartley, 435-436.

<sup>22</sup> S. A. Kaufman, "A Reconstruction of the Social Welfare System of Ancient Israel," in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature*, ed. W. Barrick and J. Spencer (1984), 278, cited by Hartley, 435.

Following the proclamation of the practice of Jubilee, the text moves to provide details pertaining to the sale of land between Jubilees. According to the text, land could only be priced according to the amount of years left until the Jubilee (vv. 14-16). In essence, this represents a lease on the land in which the buyer is simply buying the crops produced until next Jubilee (v. 16), when the land is returned to its original owner.<sup>23</sup> This practice of leasing the land prevented a permanent loss of divinely allotted lands to the families of the tribes of Israel. Furthermore, because the price of the land remained constant, the buyer was unable to exploit the poorer Israelite by buying the land for a low price and then collecting a higher price when the owner or a kinsman of the owner was able to redeem the land.<sup>24</sup> Twice within this description, the people are commanded to not exploit one another (vv. 14b, 17a). According to the repetition of the command in 25:17a, this command is based on the people's fear of God (v. 17b) and is further augmented by the use of the self-identification formula of Yahweh as God (v. 17c).<sup>25</sup>

Now that Yahweh has established the practices of both the Jubilee and the sale of land, he moves to provide an expanded exhortation supported by blessings of both security and fruitfulness in the land (vv. 18-22). Even in the years where they are commanded not to plant or harvest, Yahweh promises that he will sustain the people of Israel with a large "bumper crop" to support them for three years.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Richard Hess, "Leviticus," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary Revised Edition 1: Genesis-Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2008), 803.

<sup>24</sup> Hartley, 436.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 437.

<sup>26</sup> Wenham, 320.

### *Transition to the Redemption of the Land (25:23-24)*

Leviticus 25:23-24 serves both as the conclusion to the previous discussion of the establishment of the Jubilee practice and as the introduction of the theme of redemption of the land in the case of destitute Israelites.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, it provides the “theological principle underlying the Jubilee.”<sup>28</sup> The land is not to be sold permanently, protecting the rights of each individual to their divinely appointed inheritance<sup>29</sup> and preventing a small section of society from acquiring large tracts of land,<sup>30</sup> because it is ultimately Yahweh who owns the land and not the people. Instead, the people merely dwell in the land as “resident aliens” (גֵּרִים) and “tenants” (תּוֹשְׁבִים) under the authority and protection of Yahweh. In addition, with the declaration that every property carries the “right of redemption” (גְּלוּלָה) with it, Yahweh ensures against the development of loopholes that might allow land to be permanently lost.<sup>31</sup>

### *Example 1: Loss of Property (25:25-34)*

After establishing the principles behind the year of Jubilee, the author provides a series of examples to which these principles would apply. The first of these situations presents an Israelite who has sold part of his land as a means to alleviate debt. The example opens with the conditional clause explaining the situation (v. 25a), a relative who has become so poor that he needs to sell part of his inheritance, and outlines the

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<sup>27</sup> Jacobs, 134.

<sup>28</sup> Wenham, 320.

<sup>29</sup> Hartley, 437.

<sup>30</sup> Leiter, 166.

<sup>31</sup> Hartley, 437-438.

various options available for redemption (vv. 25b-28). The first line of defense is for the nearest relative (גאֵלוֹ הַקָּרֵב אֵלָיו) to act and redeem the land back bringing it back into the family (v. 25).<sup>32</sup> This expression “the nearest kinsman,” along with its usage in Ruth, appears to allude to a succession of responsibility for the redemption of sold property. It is possible that a list provided in 25:48-49 provides some order of succession from brothers to uncles and cousins. However, no other details about the line of succession have been preserved.<sup>33</sup>

In dealing with the issue of redemption by the nearest kinsman, two issues need to be resolved, the right of redemption by the redeemer and the issue of who controls the land after redemption. With the issue of the right of redemption, scholars question whether the kinsman in this context buys land already sold to other individuals or if he has a preemptive right to buy the land of his relative. In the immediate context, it appears that the former opinion is preferable. However, the examples of Jeremiah exercising his right to buy land directly from his cousin (Jer. 32) and Boaz’s recognition of another kinsman’s right to redeem Ruth’s land appear to favor the second option. In the end, Hartley concludes that the intent of the law focused on the redemption of land already sold and the idea of a prior right to purchase a kinsman’s land developed from this practice.<sup>34</sup> Another more serious issue arises concerning whether the redeemed land returns to its original owner or remains in the possession of the redeemer. In support of the idea of return, many scholars claim that the nature of redemption necessitates that the land be returned to its original owner. However, scholars who defend the latter option

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 438.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

claim that the purpose of the law was to maintain the land as a possession of the clan as a whole, not necessarily as the possession of the individual member of the clan. In support of this argument, an Ugaritic document reads that an individual redeemed the land of seven other individuals and kept that land until he was recompensed. However, if this is the force of the law, then the question remains as to how this benefits the brother in need. Furthermore, the immediate context seems to argue for a return of the land to the original owner.<sup>35</sup> Overall, it is likely that both options existed as possible outcomes for land redemption. However, in the end, the focus of the law is achieved in that the land remains within the clan's possession thereby preventing the loss of ancestral lands due to land speculation.<sup>36</sup>

In the event that there is no redeemer to buy back the land, the next option available is for the original owner to somehow become prosperous and garner sufficient funds to purchase back his own land (Lev 25:26-27). Following the already established principle of pricing the land (vv. 15-16), the original owner is to pay for the amount of crops that remain until the next year of Jubilee. However, in the event that the original owner is unable to purchase back his land and no kinsman redeemer is available to purchase the land, the land remains in the possession of the buyer until the year of Jubilee (v. 28). According to Hartley, this represents Yahweh acting as the kinsmen redeemer through his legislation.<sup>37</sup>

Following this presentation of various options for redemption, the example concludes with two exceptions to the law of Jubilee. The first of these concerns houses

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 438-439.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 439.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

within a walled city. According to the text, a house within a walled city carried with it the right of redemption for a year. However, if the house is not redeemed within a year of the original purchase, then the house passes into the possession of the new owner and cannot be redeemed at Jubilee (vv. 29-30). Though no reason is given for this exception, Leiter speculates that the distinction is made because houses within a walled city are not directly linked to agricultural production.<sup>38</sup> This reasoning is further supported by the fact that houses outside walled cities, which were usually in close proximity to agricultural land, carried the same rights of redemption as the lands discussed earlier (v. 31).<sup>39</sup> A further exception pertains to property belonging to the Levites. According to the text, any house sold by a Levite carried with it the usual rights of redemption and return at the Jubilee (vv. 32-33). Furthermore, the sale of their pastureland is prohibited in all circumstances (v. 34). This exception finds its rationale in the fact that, unlike the other tribes, the Levites did not inherit large tracts of land. Instead, the Levites were allotted forty-eight cities with the immediate surrounding pastureland (Num 35:1-8). This exception then is to prevent the total destitution of the Levites.<sup>40</sup>

*Example 2: Economic Dependence (25:35-38)*

The second example provided by the Jubilee legislation details a situation where an Israelite has become so poor that he must now be dependent economically on his fellow countrymen. Much like the previous example, 25:35 begins with a similar conditional clause introducing the situation of poverty. However, in this example, a

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<sup>38</sup> Leiter, 166-167.

<sup>39</sup> Hess, 806.

<sup>40</sup> Wenham, 321.

further detail has been added. This Israelite is now unable to support himself (וְיָמָה יָדָהּ v.35 – literally, “his hand shakes”).<sup>41</sup> In order to alleviate this situation, the Israelites are to support him (Hif’il יָדָהּ v. 35 – “strengthen”) as they would a foreigner living among them. Furthermore, along with the command to support their brother, the law prohibits Israel from taking advantage of their vulnerable brother by charging interest or seeking to make a profit on any loan of money or food (vv. 36-37).<sup>42</sup> This prohibition is once again motivated by fear of God (v. 36) and made authoritative by another self-identification clause of Yahweh as God (v. 38).<sup>43</sup> However, this self-identification also provides an expansion upon the previous one (v. 17) through the inclusion of Yahweh’s deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt as a basis for both Israel’s covenant relationship with him and as the theological foundation for their actions regarding their destitute brother. Because he has shown mercy to them, he requires them to show mercy to others around them.<sup>44</sup>

#### *Example 3: Servitude to a Fellow Israelite (25:39-46)*

As the situation of the poor Israelite deteriorated, it was possible that the circumstances would lead him to sell himself as a laborer to a fellow Israelite. Though this seems rather undesirable, the alternative of death through starvation would make this a valid option.<sup>45</sup> In this case, the new master is required to treat this individual as a hired

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<sup>41</sup> Hartley, 438.

<sup>42</sup> Leiter, 167.

<sup>43</sup> Hartley, 440; Leiter 167.

<sup>44</sup> Hartley, 440.

<sup>45</sup> Gane, 438.



laborer (vv. 39-40) and is prohibited from treating him ruthlessly (בַּפֶּרֶךְ, v. 43). At the Jubilee, the man is to be released, along with his children, and allowed to return to his family (בְּשִׁפְחוֹתָו) and to his ancestral land (אֶרֶץ אֲבוֹתָיו – lit. “the possession of his fathers”) (v. 41). Though the motivation for the command is once again the fear of God (v. 43), Yahweh’s ownership of Israel due to his redemption of them from slavery in Egypt helps to further motivate the prohibition of slavery (v. 42).<sup>46</sup> The goal is to prevent the kind of harsh slavery experienced by the Israelites in Egypt.<sup>47</sup>

With the legislation governing one Israelite’s bondage to another, the text also provides an exception regarding slaves of individuals outside of the nation of Israel (vv. 44-46). Though they are not allowed to own fellow Israelites, the Israelites are permitted to purchase slaves from among the nations surrounding them and possess them as property (אִמָּוָה, v. 45). Furthermore, this slavery is perpetual and these slaves may even be passed on to children as an inheritance (v. 46).<sup>48</sup> Though some might see this as an example of glaring injustice or as establishing parameters of justice only for those inside the group,<sup>49</sup> it is important to note that there were laws that protected the rights of all slaves, regardless of nationality (Ex 21:20-21, 26-27).<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, though it is true that the distinction does exist between Israelites and foreigners regarding the year of Jubilee, this distinction is based upon membership within the covenant and is something

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<sup>46</sup> Hartley, 441.

<sup>47</sup> Wenham, 322.

<sup>48</sup> Hartley, 441.

<sup>49</sup> See Jacobs for an example of this argument.

<sup>50</sup> Gane, 442.

maintained throughout the Torah as a way to differentiate the people of God from those outside Yahweh's covenant promises.

*Example 4: Servitude to a non-Israelite (25:47-55)*

In one final example, the text describes a situation of severe poverty that has reduced the poor man to sell himself into slavery to a foreigner. However, though the owner of the new slave is outside the covenant community, the rules of the Jubilee still apply to the situation. Using language similar to the redemption of land mentioned earlier in the text, the man is to be redeemed by a kinsman redeemer<sup>51</sup> (vv. 48b-49a) or, if he gains sufficient funds, he may redeem himself (v. 49b). Once again, the price for redemption is set according to the amount of time remaining until the Jubilee and the wages of a hired laborer (vv. 50-52). If none of these conditions are met, then he and his children are to be released in the year of Jubilee (v. 54). Furthermore, in similar fashion to the previous legislation, the foreign master is prohibited from treating his Israelite servant harshly (בַּפֶּרֶךְ) but is required to treat him as a hired laborer (v. 53). Also, the motivation for these laws is the self-identification of Yahweh and his ownership of the people due to the event of the Exodus (v. 55). With this Exodus background, combined with the text's use of the verb נָצַח (vv. 54-55) to describe the release, Yahweh is portrayed as Israel's redeemer preventing further slavery similar to their experience in Egypt.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Within this example, the text expands upon the redemption by kinsmen through the inclusion of various relatives (brothers, uncles, and cousins) as kinsmen obligated to take part in the redemption of their fellow Israelite. Although no order of redemption is stated here, it can be assumed that the responsibility was based upon the proximity of the relative and possibly the age of the kinsman, starting with the closest and eldest individuals (Hartley, 442).

<sup>52</sup> Hartley, 442.

## *Conclusion*

The instructions for Jubilee reflect God's demand for social justice among his covenant community. These laws seek to maintain ancestral land divisions and prevent perpetual slavery as a means of preventing the development of social classes through the concentration of wealth among the elite and the exploitation of the weaker individuals of society at the hands of the powerful. Furthermore, the text also seeks to illustrate and remind the Israelites about the divine ownership of the land and the people based upon Yahweh's position as Lord and his action of deliverance in the event of the exodus.

## **Isaiah 61**

### *Context*

Following the establishment of the covenant community along the lines of the Torah, the Israelites eventually enter and take control of the land. After this event, the central issue of the following narratives becomes whether or not the children of Israel will remain faithful to their covenant with Yahweh. Unfortunately, as the Biblical narrative details, Israel breaks this covenant with Yahweh repeatedly. As successive books describe, Israel continually abandons Yahweh for idols and exhibits the moral behaviors of their surrounding neighbors, including oppression of the weak and poor. By the time of the literary prophets, God ordains certain men to bring a message against Israel concerning this breach of the covenant. This message contains an accusation against the people coupled with a call to repentance, a warning of judgment if the people do not repent, and a promise of future restoration beyond the judgment.<sup>53</sup> When the reader comes to the book of Isaiah, the text largely follows this prophetic message, beginning with a focus on judgment against Israel and the nations but also with hints of a

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<sup>53</sup> J. Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 63-69.

restoration (chs. 1-39). Following this, the prophet moves to emphasize the restoration of his people centered on a series of four servant songs (42:1-7; 49:1-6; 50:4-10; 52:13-53:12) that describe an individual bearing the Spirit of Yahweh who will suffer greatly and yet bring about the restoration through a new covenant (chs. 40-55). The book ends with a call to righteous living while Israel waits on God to enact his restoration (chs. 56-66).<sup>54</sup> It is within the last section of the book that the text of Isaiah 61 finds its place. According to Hays, this text is set within a promise of future restoration (chs. 60-62), preceded by an indictment against Israel for unrighteousness, specifically for idolatry, social injustice and religious formalism, and followed by a further call to ethical living.<sup>55</sup> Matthew Lynch further develops this structure by arguing that two “warrior panels” (59:15b-21; 63:1-6), in which Yahweh is portrayed as a divine warrior bringing restoration for Zion and judgment for her enemies, bracket the promise of Zion’s restoration forming an *inclusio* around Isaiah 59:15b-63:6. According to this argument, the preceding oracles against Israel for her unrighteousness (55:9-59:15a), most notably social injustice, serve to portray Israel as completely devoid of both justice and righteousness (vv. 14-15a). Thus, Yahweh himself steps in as a divine warrior coming to bring judgment upon the Earth and to establish a righteous Zion within it. This pinnacle occurs as Yahweh is portrayed as establishing his covenant with the people who turn from their unrighteousness (vv. 20-21). Isaiah 60-62 then details Yahweh’s establishment of Zion as his kingdom over the nations, punctuated by decrees for justice and liberty for the oppressed (ch. 61). Following this establishment of Zion, a further “warrior panel”

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 98-100, 123-125, 136.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 136-142.

63:1-6) appears to complete the actions of Yahweh in the previous section with a report of his victory over the nations.<sup>56</sup> With this context in mind, the promise of Isaiah 61 represents Yahweh responding to the injustices prevalent in Israel through his intervention and establishment of justice as a part of his holy kingdom.

### *Structure*

The overall structure of the passage follows a series of declarations by three separate individuals. The first speaker, the anointed one of 61:1, begins by proclaiming his mission and what actions that entails (vv. 1-3a). Following this, he describes the resulting benefits for the people of Zion and for the nations (vv. 3b-7). Next, Yahweh himself speaks, establishing his covenant with the people (vv. 8-9). Finally, the text concludes with a psalm praising Yahweh for what he has done for the people of Zion (vv. 10-11).<sup>57</sup>

### *The Anointed's mission (61:1-3a)*

As the chapter opens, an unnamed speaker presents himself as being anointed by the Spirit of the Lord in order to proclaim good news to the poor (v. 61a). Following this proclamation is a list of six infinitival clauses that explain the mission that this individual was sent to carry out. There has been much debate over the exact identity of the speaker. Traditionally, many scholars have identified this individual with the servant of Yahweh described in Isaiah 40-55. This identification finds support in the fact that Isaiah 61 bears striking similarity to the servant songs. Both feature an anointing of the Spirit (42:1; 61:1),

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<sup>56</sup> Matthew J. Lynch, "Zion's Warrior and the Nations: Isaiah 59:15b-63:6 in Isaiah's Zion Traditions," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70 (2008): 244-263.

<sup>57</sup> John H. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 649.

are introduced with a first person address (49:1ff; 50:4ff; 61:1ff), employ many of the same terms to describe the individual's mission (binding the brokenhearted, opening the eyes of the blind, proclaiming liberty to prisoners), and appear to have similar missions overall, to bring about deliverance that results in righteousness.<sup>58</sup> Claus Westermann has identified the speaker as the prophet himself, the post-exilic author of Isaiah 56-66 or Third/Trito-Isaiah. According to this theory, the text represents the recognition of the call of this prophet in regard to his post-exilic situation. He recognizes the connections between Isaiah 61 and the servant songs of Isaiah 40-55, but argues that this is Trito-Isaiah's attempt to take up the mission of his predecessor, whom Westermann refers to as Second or Deutero-Isaiah (the author of chs. 40-55). However, each Isaiah expresses his mission differently maintaining the distinction between the two.<sup>59</sup> Brevard Childs, working from conclusions drawn by Beuken, qualifies Westermann's theory by claiming that this text does not have to represent the personal call of Trito-Isaiah. Instead he argues that the speaker of Isaiah 61 could be either an individual or a group who is attempting to present themselves as the "offspring" of Deutero-Isaiah's suffering servant.<sup>60</sup> Another option, argued by Delitzsch, is to identify this speaker with the Messiah figure of Isaiah 11. This identification recognizes the eschatological nature of the speaker of Isaiah 61 and notes similarities in the presence of the Spirit, the use of the words of his mouth, the work of establishing righteousness, and the resulting glorification of Yahweh.<sup>61</sup> A final

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<sup>58</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 2001), 502-503; John H. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 562-563.

<sup>59</sup> Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), 365-366.

<sup>60</sup> Childs, 503.

option, presented by John Oswalt, claims that the author of Isaiah has both the servant and the Messiah in view as the speaker of Isaiah 61. According to Oswalt, this identification represents the overall synthetic function of Isaiah 56-66, affirming that the servant and the Messiah are indeed the same person. Furthermore, he claims this interpretation is supported by Christ's appropriation of these words to describe his ministry (Luke 4:16-21).<sup>62</sup> Though some might argue that this claim represents a reading of New Testament theology back into the Old Testament text, an action that might blur the original meaning of the text,<sup>63</sup> this theory appears to correctly identify, regardless of New Testament development, the speaker of Isaiah 61 as a representative of both the servant and Messianic figures.

As the speaker begins his proclamation, he establishes the source of his authority by claiming that he has been anointed with the Spirit of Yahweh. Throughout the Old Testament, this anointing carries with it the idea of a supernatural wisdom and capacity to accomplish the plans of the Lord (Ex 31:1-11; Num 11:16-17). Specifically in Isaiah, it is associated with the power to bring justice and righteousness to the Earth (11:2; 32:5-16; 42:1; 48:16). Thus this individual is marked by the wisdom and power of God.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the author employs a rare Hebrew phrase (אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה "the Lord Yahweh") both here and at the end of the proclamation (v. 11) to emphasize the

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<sup>61</sup> Oswalt, NICOT, 563.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Childs, 505.

<sup>64</sup> Oswalt, NICOT, 564.

importance of this proclamation.<sup>65</sup> Immediately following the discussion of the anointing is an infinitival phrase indicating the purpose of the anointing, to bear good news to the poor. This verb “to bring good news” (בשר v. 1) has appeared at critical places within Isaiah, usually in the context of hope for Israel (40:9; 41:27; 52:7; 60:6).<sup>66</sup> Regarding the poor, this term does not have to be limited to those in financial distress, but can be expanded to include all those who are disadvantaged or in helpless situations.<sup>67</sup> Thus the mission of the anointed is to bring good news to those who desperately need it.

With the proclamation made, the speaker then begins to explain the content of his good news with six infinitival phrases following the verb שלח. First, he has come to “bind up the broken hearted.” “To bind up” (חבש v. 1) carries the idea of binding wounds (1:6) and, in this context, represents the healing from every form of human breakdown.<sup>68</sup> Along with this healing, the speaker also promises to proclaim release to those who are captives. The term used for release, דרור (v. 1), is usually associated with the freeing of slaves during the Year of Jubilee (Lev 25:10; Jer 34:8; Ezek 46:17).<sup>69</sup> Thus, the speaker’s ministry will be like the Year of Jubilee, bringing freedom and a new beginning for those who are distressed. The speaker next expands upon this idea of freedom with the promise of opening the eyes of those who are imprisoned, the image

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<sup>65</sup> Childs, 503.

<sup>66</sup> Oswalt, NICOT, 564.

<sup>67</sup> J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 500; Oswalt, NICOT, 564-565.

<sup>68</sup> Motyer, *Prophecy*, 500.

<sup>69</sup> Childs, 505; Motyer, *Prophecy*, 500; Oswalt, NICOT, 565.



being one of bringing out of darkness and into the light.<sup>70</sup> Following the promise of freedom, the anointed one moves next to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and day of the Lord's vengeance (v. 2a). Here the year of favor is another reference to the year of Jubilee and continues to point the servant's mission to that of a great release.<sup>71</sup> Regarding the day of vengeance, it appears to take up the concept of the Day of Yahweh, a day of divine judgment mentioned throughout the prophets (Is 2:12; 13:6; Joel 2:1ff).<sup>72</sup> Although it is possible that the use of "year" for favor and "day" for vengeance indicates a stress on the favor of the Lord or describes a shorter period of vengeance,<sup>73</sup> the evidence suggests that these terms are just used to refer to concrete periods of time, though not necessarily expressing each period's relative length.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, though the day of vengeance might appear out of place surrounded by terms of healing, liberation, and comfort and would lead some to point to its later addition, it must be noted that, for there to be a release from oppression, there must be a judgment against the sources of oppression. Thus, it would be a source of great comfort for those who are oppressed to know that the source of the oppression will get exactly what it deserves.<sup>75</sup> The final mission of the speaker is to comfort those who mourn by replacing their sadness with joy (vv. 2b-3a). This "divine replacement therapy" is highlighted by the replacement of the inward moving signs of mourning (ashes – outer symbol, mourning –

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<sup>70</sup> J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 377.

<sup>71</sup> Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah: On Eagle's Wings*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 234.

<sup>72</sup> Westermann, 367.

<sup>73</sup> Motyer, *Prophecy*, 500.

<sup>74</sup> Oswalt, NICOT, 566.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

related to the heart, spirit of despair – the inner layer) with the downward moving garments of joy (headdress, oil – head, garment – clothing).<sup>76</sup> With the use of “headdress” (כִּנֹּף) and “ashes” (אֵפֶן), the author employs a wordplay and illustrates that the speaker applies the remedy to exactly the same location as the hurt. With “garment,” the author indicates an all-encompassing solution to the spirit of despair.<sup>77</sup> In summary, the mission of the Lord’s anointed is one of healing, liberation, justice, and comfort.

#### *The Benefits of the Anointed’s mission (61:3b-7)*

Having established the mission of the anointed one, the text moves from infinitival components of the proclamation to declarative statements that detail the results of the speaker’s proclamation. The vav that connects the two sections is taken to express result, further establishing this structure.<sup>78</sup> The first result of the mission is that of a change in name and status. They are now “oaks of righteousness” planted by the Lord for his glory (vv. 3b). Earlier, in Isaiah, oaks have been used as a symbol for false religion (1:29; 57:5). However, they have been transformed by Yahweh to now represent righteousness, right standing and acceptance before God. Furthermore, they are a “planting of the Lord,” indicating Yahweh as the source for their character.<sup>79</sup> The result of this transformation is that the people now display the glory of the Lord.

Following the declaration of a new status, the text also includes reconstruction as a result of the anointed’s mission. Using a similar construction as the previous verse (vav

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<sup>76</sup> Motyer, TOTC, 377.

<sup>77</sup> Motyer, *Prophecy*, 501.

<sup>78</sup> Oswalt, NICOT, 567.

<sup>79</sup> Motyer, *Prophecy*, 501.

consecutive + perfect verb), this reconstruction is depicted as a rebuilding of long-standing devastation that multiple generations have been unable to repair. In view here is the picture of restoration and rebuilding that is to follow the exile. According to Motyer, this picture represents “a great recovery, entrance into the true kingdom of God, the land of spiritual inheritance in which every breakdown of the past is mended no matter how long-standing.”<sup>80</sup>

Along with this reconstruction, the mission of the anointed will also have an impact on the relationship of Zion to the nations (vv. 5-6). Those nations that formerly oppressed the people of God are now described as serving the Israelites by working with their flocks and in their fields. However, though this might appear to picture a second-class citizenship for the nations, the picture here is of the nations gladly taking their place among the people of God.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, the people of Israel do not rule over the nations, enacting their revenge for former oppression. Instead, they are commissioned as priests of the Lord, a fact that is recognized by the nations.<sup>82</sup> Thus, the restoration is not depicting a situation where the oppression is reversed, but instead depicts a situation in which Israel finally fulfills their priestly role to the nations and the nations are included within the blessings of the new kingdom of God.

The list of results concludes with a description of a great reversal of fortune for the people of God (v. 7). Linguistically, 61:7 is difficult. As written in the Masoretic Text, it appears that the first two lines of the verse feature an ellipsis of the preposition לְ in the second line and an omission of verb from the whole phrase. The easiest

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Motyer, *Prophecy*, 502.

<sup>82</sup> Oswalt, 571.

solution to this issue is to recognize that the **תחת** of the first line governs the whole couplet and to infer a verb like “you will receive,” which has either dropped out or is assumed in the context.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, the couplet also contains an awkward shift in the pronominal suffixes from the second person to the third person. Though some commentators have attempted to identify two different referents for the pronouns, it is probably best to assume an “enallage of persons” in which both pronouns refer to the same subject.<sup>84</sup> Regardless of textual difficulties, the emphasis is on the reversal of shame in which Israel now enjoys a double portion from Yahweh. Here the image of double portion is that of the double portion of the estate given to the firstborn son upon his inheritance.<sup>85</sup> Though they once possessed shame, the people of God will now inherit their double portion of joy. The result of this double portion is that they will enjoy it forever within the land.<sup>86</sup> This is no temporary reversal but an everlasting promise of joy from Yahweh.

#### *Yahweh Speaks (61:8-9)*

Following the speech of the anointed one, Yahweh now speaks confirming the mission of the previous speaker and its results through an expression of his character and the promise of a new covenant. The use of **אני** indicates that the following declaration of Yahweh stands as the theological foundation for what has preceded.<sup>87</sup> The identification

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 568-569.

<sup>84</sup> Childs, 506.

<sup>85</sup> Oswalt, 572.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Motyer, *Prophecy*, 503.

of Yahweh as one who loves justice and hates robbery follows the typical divine self-identification formula composed of the first person independent pronoun and the divine name followed by a participle: “I am the Lord who is characterized by a certain type of action.”<sup>88</sup> Regarding the hatred of robbery, the Hebrew text literally reads “robbery in a burnt offering (עֹלָה בְּעֹלָה v. 8).” In interpreting this phrase, many commentators have assumed a misspelling within the text, evidenced by the Septuagint reading of ἀδικίας (“wrongdoing”), concluding that the text originally read iniquity (עֲוֹנָה) instead of burnt offering (עֹלָה).<sup>89</sup> Others, choosing to retain the MT text, have concluded that this refers to Yahweh’s condemnation of corruption in worship (1:13).<sup>90</sup> Some claim however that, in the context of Yahweh speaking on behalf of the Israelites and promising a reward, this interpretation appears unlikely, thus arguing for “iniquity.”<sup>91</sup> However, noticing a parallel between this line and the following line (“their recompense in faithfulness”), Motyer concludes that “robbery in the burnt offering” is the correct translation and means not giving the full measure of the offering to God. Given this parallel, it appears that the MT reading is preferred. Thus, Yahweh requires unreserved commitment from his people. However, just as he demands faithfulness from his people, Yahweh also assures the Israelites that he will be faithful to his standards and reward the people for their

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<sup>88</sup> Oswalt, NICOT, 572.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 569.

<sup>90</sup> Childs, 506.

<sup>91</sup> Oswalt, NICOT, 573.

faithfulness.<sup>92</sup> בְּרִית עוֹלָם reveals the substance of both the double portion and the reward given in faithfulness: an everlasting covenant between Yahweh and his people.

The result of God's character (v. 9) is twofold and centers around the idea of descendants (זֶרַע – lit. "seed"). First, there will be many Israelite offspring as a fulfillment of the promise to Abraham.<sup>93</sup> Second, the fact that they are blessed by Yahweh and have a special place in his sight will be recognized by the nations.<sup>94</sup>

#### *Response of Praise (61:10-11)*

Having outlined the mission of the anointed one and connected it with the character of God, the text concludes with a hymn of praise to Yahweh. There is some debate regarding the identity of the one giving the hymn. One opinion holds that the speaker is none other than the anointed one of vv. 1-7 rejoicing over the fact that his mission has been confirmed by Yahweh (vv. 8-9).<sup>95</sup> Motyer argues for this option on the basis of the hymn's description of already having experienced the blessings of Yahweh while the rest of the passage points to these blessings as occurring in the future.<sup>96</sup> However, following a Targum which inserts "Jerusalem has said" prior to the psalm,<sup>97</sup> others conclude that the psalm is given by a representative of the community

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<sup>92</sup> Motyer, *Prophecy*, 503.

<sup>93</sup> Oswalt, NICOT, 573.

<sup>94</sup> Childs, 506; Westermann, 370.

<sup>95</sup> Childs, 506.

<sup>96</sup> Motyer, *Prophecy*, 504.

<sup>97</sup> Childs, 506.

experiencing the blessings of the anointed's mission.<sup>98</sup> Based upon the emphasis on benefits received from Yahweh through the mission of the anointed within the psalm, this appears to be the best identification for the source of the hymn. Thus, the hymn is a response of praise for what Yahweh has done for his covenant people. In order to describe these gifts, the hymnist employs the imagery of clothing (v. 10b), a wedding (v. 10c) and a plant sprouting (v. 11). First, the hymnist illustrates that Yahweh clothes the covenant community in robes of righteousness and salvation indicating that it is through his power and provision that the people are able to live righteously. This image is then expanded using wedding imagery to indicate the joy that is related to this occasion. Furthermore, the term "headdress" (כִּנְדָּה) from 61:3 is again used to represent the joy that comes through the provision of Yahweh. Finally, the hymnist uses the image of the reliability of the earth bringing forth plants to further demonstrate the ability of Yahweh to bring about righteousness and praise among the nations.<sup>99</sup>

#### *Development of Leviticus 25 in Isaiah 61*

Through his use of the language of the Jubilee (יָבֵיבִית) and the reference to the "year of the Lord's favor," the speaker of Isaiah 61 explicitly draws on the theme of the year of Jubilee to describe the mission of Yahweh's anointed. With this linking, the speaker indicates that part of this figure's mission will be to bring freedom from oppression like what the debt slave or poor Israelite experienced during the Year of Jubilee. However, this release is no longer simply a physical release from economic suffering and a restoration of an impoverished Israelite to his property. Instead, it has

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<sup>98</sup> Oswalt, NICOT, 574; Westermann, 370-371.

<sup>99</sup> Oswalt, NICOT, 575.

now become part of a divine initiative to rescue and restore the people of God from all kinds of suffering. In addition, it is important to note that it is no longer the fellow Israelite who redeems or restores but this act of deliverance occurs by the power of Yahweh through his anointed. Furthermore, although Leviticus 25 appeared to exclude the nations from taking part in the practices of release and restoration during the Year of Jubilee, Isaiah 61 indicates that they will be present as part of the coming year of the Lord's favor.

### *Conclusion*

Although centuries have passed since Yahweh's original mandate to Israel to maintain social justice through the practice of Jubilee, Yahweh's character has not changed. Yahweh still loves justice and hates oppression. Although Israel has failed to accomplish their divine mandate to practice justice, Isaiah 61 indicates that Yahweh himself will intervene as a divine warrior and establish his justice in Israel and the nations. According to the text, this intervention will be accomplished by Yahweh's anointed servant who, among his actions of healing and restoration, will bring about the very Jubilee release from oppression that Israel failed to accomplish.

### **Luke 4:14-30**

#### *Context*

Following the return from the Exile, Israel spent the next few centuries awaiting the deliverer who was promised in prophetic texts like Isaiah 61. Though they had returned to the land, they were still under foreign rule and did not experience the level of blessing that they had experienced before the exile or that they had been promised with the coming of the Messiah. Thus, Israel was left waiting for a better deliverance and



restoration. Eventually, this would come, though not as they expected, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. According to the four Gospels, Jesus fulfilled the messianic expectations of the prophets and accomplished the deliverance of Israel through his inauguration of the Kingdom of God. One such Gospel account, the book of Luke, contains a written account of the life and teaching of Jesus written by Luke, a companion of Paul, to one Theophilus – a possible follower of Christ and financier of Luke’s Gospel – and a larger Gentile Audience.<sup>100</sup> This Gospel account narrates the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus in order to portray him as the savior for all people. Throughout his life, Christ is presented as fulfilling the promises of both an eschatological prophet like Moses and, more importantly, the Messiah, God’s agent of deliverance.<sup>101</sup> In one such portrayal (4:14-30), placed early in the account of Jesus’ Galilean ministry,<sup>102</sup> Luke describes a scene in which Jesus declares himself as the Lord’s anointed while teaching at a synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. Within this declaration, he quotes from Isaiah 61 and announces that he is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. Within this declaration, Christ links himself to the salvific mission of the anointed figure of Isaiah, specifically, the mission of social justice to the oppressed. For many scholars, this citation and its placement at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry

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<sup>100</sup> Hays and Duvall, 604.

<sup>101</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 281-282.

<sup>102</sup> Luke appears to portray an event similar to Mark 6:1-6 and Matthew 13:53-58 which place this event later in the ministry of Christ. Furthermore, the Lucan account, containing the content of the Nazarene sermon, is significantly longer than both the Marcan and Matthean accounts. In order to solve these issues several solutions have been proposed, ranging from theories claiming two separate events to a Lucan conflation of two events to a Lucan addition of theological details for the purpose of his Gospel. However, it appears that the best solution is that Luke is presenting an elaboration on the same event and has placed this event earlier in the ministry of Christ as a programmatic introduction to his Galilean ministry, so, Darrel L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 394-398; Walter L. Liefeld, “Luke,” in *Expositors Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8, ed. Frank E. Gabelein (Grand Rapids, 1984), 866).

represent a definition of the nature of Christ's ministry as a whole.<sup>103</sup> One scholar even describes this citation as the "programmatic" narrative, introducing many of the themes developed throughout the rest of Luke-Acts.<sup>104</sup> Following this incident, the people attempt to throw Jesus from a nearby hill. However, he escapes to continue his ministry of healing and teaching in the surrounding countryside.

### *Structure*

The passage begins with a brief description of Jesus' early ministry in Galilee (vv. 14-15). Following this summary, Luke describes how Jesus enters a synagogue and teaches on a reading from Isaiah 61, claiming that it was fulfilled on that very day (vv. 16-21). At this declaration, the people respond to what he has spoken, appearing to be amazed and yet questioning his interpretation (v. 22). In response to their questioning, Jesus responds with two parables and two examples from Israel's history to illustrate their reluctance to accept him (vv. 23-27). Hearing his response, the people become enraged and seek to kill Jesus. However, he simply passes through them and goes on his way (vv. 28-30).

### *Summary of Ministry (4:14-15)*

Immediately after his narration of the Temptation account, Luke transitions into his account of the Galilean ministry with an introduction outlining the character of Christ's work in Galilee.<sup>105</sup> This introduction helps transition into the following account

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<sup>103</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 207.

<sup>104</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 177-178.

<sup>105</sup> Darrel L. Bock, *Luke*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 134.

of the Nazarene sermon through its emphasis on Jesus' spirit-filled ministry and general reaction to his teaching. His return in the power of the Spirit appears to be indicative of the authority of his teaching although the idea of performing powerful miracles might also be present.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore the reference to the general response of the people to the teaching ministry of Jesus, occurring solely in synagogues,<sup>107</sup> will serve as a stark contrast to the reaction he will receive in his hometown of Nazareth.

#### *Proclamation (4:16-21)*

Following the summary of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, Luke now moves to narrate the events of Christ's sermon in Nazareth. As the text opens, Jesus is found attending a synagogue in order to participate in the service according to his usual manner (v. 16a). This expression could indicate either that Jesus was a pious Jew who regularly attended the synagogue<sup>108</sup> or that he regularly teaches in the synagogue.<sup>109</sup> Though both options seem valid, due to the preceding summary of Jesus' teaching mission, it is more likely that Christ not only attended synagogue regularly but also taught on a regular basis. Entering the synagogue, Jesus stands up to read and teach from a scroll of Isaiah. Given what is known about the typical synagogue service order,<sup>110</sup> Luke focuses the narrative

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<sup>106</sup> Marshall, 176.

<sup>107</sup> François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 152.

<sup>108</sup> Bock, BECNT, 402

<sup>109</sup> John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 195.

<sup>110</sup> Within this text, Luke gives the oldest reference to a specific order for a synagogue service. According to the *Mishnah*, the service would open with a recitation of the *Shema* followed by a congregational prayer (usually some form of set prayer such as the *Shemoneh Esreh* [18 Benedictions] and the *Tephillah*). Next would come a reading from both the Torah and the Prophets followed by some form of instruction provided by a male from the congregation. The service is then concluded with a benediction (Bock, BECNT 403; Bock, NIVAC, 136; Marshall, 181-182).

on an event during “the middle of the second, more didactic, half of the service.”<sup>111</sup>

According to the text, Jesus is handed a scroll and proceeds to unroll it and read the text (vv. 17-19), followed by his interpretation of the text (vv. 21). Regarding the selection of the text for the service, some have suggested that there was a fixed three-year liturgical pattern for the reading of the prophets within a synagogue service.<sup>112</sup> However, this appears to be rather unlikely. Instead, due to Jesus’ opening and finding of the particular passage from Isaiah, it is more likely that he chose it himself as the text to be read for the day.<sup>113</sup>

Having opened the scroll and found his desired passage, Jesus reads a combination of texts from Isaiah 58:6 and 61:1-2a. As a whole, the quotation presented in Luke follows the Septuagint rather closely with a few notable exceptions: 1) the use in 4:19 of the synonym κηρυξαι (“to preach”) in place of καλεσαι (“to call”); 2) replacement of the phrase “to heal the broken hearted” with “to proclaim liberty to the captives”; and 3) completing the quotation before the second half of Isaiah 61:2 detailing the day of the Lord’s vengeance.<sup>114</sup> Regarding the change from κηρυξαι to καλεσαι in 4:19, Bock argues that Luke substitutes the former because it appears to be the better descriptor of Jesus’ teaching ministry.<sup>115</sup> Regarding the conflation of Isaiah 58 and 61 through the substitution of 58:6 for Isaiah 61:1c, a wide range of solutions has been

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<sup>111</sup> Bovon, 153.

<sup>112</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: TN, Broadman Press, 1992), 155.

<sup>113</sup> Bock, BECNT, 403-404; Nolland 196.

<sup>114</sup> Bock, BECNT, 404-405.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 404.

presented. One theory sees the addition as a Christian exegetical insertion, perhaps as a way to introduce the concept of forgiveness into the text.<sup>116</sup> Another theory suggests that this conflation represents a reading of Isaiah 61 in which the phrase from Isaiah 58 has been inserted. This theory is supported by the similar terminology in both Septuagint passages, the parallel usage of Jubilee imagery in both texts, and the linking of these two passages in Second Temple Judaism.<sup>117</sup> It is even possible that Jesus himself committed the insertion while reading the text, by virtue of his “prophetic authority.”<sup>118</sup> However, given that most synagogue readings did not feature mixed passages and that the Lucan narrative presents a brief, dramatic snapshot of what would have been a longer exposition, it is most likely that Jesus read from and used both passages in his synagogue sermon.<sup>119</sup> Regarding the final omission of the day of vengeance from the original Isaiah text, this probably represents Christ’s theological emphasis on the message of deliverance and salvation in the current context.<sup>120</sup> Given the whole body of Christ’s teachings within the Gospels, divine judgment does play a major role within the redemptive mission of God but here is outside Christ’s immediate salvific emphasis.

As Christ begins his reading, the text points first to the anointing of the Spirit upon the prophet’s life. Within the context of Christ’s ministry, this refers back to the previous event of the baptism in the Jordan and the descent of the Spirit upon Christ

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<sup>116</sup> Marshall, 182.

<sup>117</sup> Bock, BECNT, 404-405.

<sup>118</sup> Marshall, 183.

<sup>119</sup> Bock, BECNT, 405.

<sup>120</sup> Bock, 405; Marshall, 183.

(Luke 3:21-22).<sup>121</sup> Following this initial reference to anointing, the prophet's mission is detailed through a series of infinitives. The first infinitive points to an overall summary of his mission as bringing good news to the poor (v. 18c). In reference to the "poor" as the recipients of the good news, the materially poor may be in view here. However, it is more likely that this is expanded to include all those who are disadvantaged, considered outsiders, and in desperate need of divine help.<sup>122</sup> The first of these expansions describes Christ bringing liberty to those who are in captivity. In order to understand this aspect of Jesus' mission, it is important to note this text's employment of the term ἀφεσις. Within the Septuagint, the term and its accompanying verbal root are usually employed to translate concepts of physical release either from physical suffering or captivity/exile (יִבֹּל [Lev 25:10ff]; כָּרַח [Lev 25:10; Is 58:6; 61:1]), However, the term is occasionally used to refer to spiritual release, specifically in the context of remission of sins (Lev 16:26).<sup>123</sup> In Luke-Acts, the term is almost exclusively used to refer to the spiritual act of forgiveness of sins, usually with the direct object ἁμαρτιῶν (Luke 1:77; 3:3; 24:27; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18). At first, this might lead to the conclusion that, while the Old Testament text focuses on physical liberation with the occasional mention of spiritual release, by the time of the New Testament, the physical aspect of release has been dropped and only the spiritual sense remains. Thus, Christ's mission to bring release to the captives only refers to the forgiveness of sins. However, noting the spiritual nature of captivity within the Old Testament prophets (exile as a

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<sup>121</sup> Bock, 407; Nolland, 196.

<sup>122</sup> Marshall, 183; Green, 211.

<sup>123</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "ἀφεσις," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, 1:510.

result of sin)<sup>124</sup> and Christ's actions and teachings regarding the poor (Luke 16:19-31; 18:18-29; 19:1-10), this is a false distinction. Both aspects are present within the ministry of Christ, announced in Luke 4. Along with this physical and spiritual release, the mission of Christ will also include the proclamation of the recovery of sight to those who are blind. Though Christ's ministry included those who are physically blind, the spiritual undertones of Luke also indicate that this citation includes the healing of the spiritually blinded.<sup>125</sup> Next, Christ once again refers to his mission of bringing liberty to the oppressed through his insertion of Isaiah 58:6 into his reading of Isaiah 61. Within the context of Isaiah 58, Yahweh is making an accusation against the people of Israel for their failure to be a source of liberty to the oppressed. With Christ's usage of this text, he is presenting a link between the accusations against Israel for their lack of social justice (Is 58) and the mission of the anointed to bring restoration to the people of God (Is 61). As a part of his divine restoration, Christ is claiming that he will accomplish what Israel failed to do, bringing justice to those who are oppressed.<sup>126</sup> The final task quoted within Christ's citation is that of bringing about the year of the Lord's favor (v. 19). Though some might doubt the connection,<sup>127</sup> the image here is that of the Levitical idea of the Year of Jubilee. Due to its development within Isaiah and Second Temple Judaism, most notably at Qumran,<sup>128</sup> the theme of Jubilee had, by the time of Christ, been taken beyond

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<sup>124</sup> Bock, BECNT, 409.

<sup>125</sup> Bock, BECNT, 409; Stein, 156.

<sup>126</sup> Bock, BECNT, 409-410; NIVAC, 136.

<sup>127</sup> Stein, 157.

<sup>128</sup> One piece of Qumran literature, 11QMelchizedek, is noted for its interweaving of the themes of Jubilee and the Sabbath as a way to illustrate the release and restoration that come with the eschatological deliverance of Israel and the judgment of her enemies (Green, 213).

its initial legal application and was now used to refer to the eschatological deliverance of God, accompanied by serious sociological implications.<sup>129</sup> Thus, through this reference, Christ is linking his ministry to the eschatological salvation of the people of God along with the social implications of the Jubilee.

Following his reading of the text, Jesus hands the scroll to the attendant and prepares to give an interpretation concerning what has been read (v. 20).<sup>130</sup> In 4:21, Luke presents a summary of Christ's interpretation through his declaration that what has been read is being fulfilled in front of their very eyes. With this declaration, Christ identifies himself as the fulfillment of the promised figure of Isaiah 61. Liefeld concludes that, with this declaration, Christ declares himself the "bearer of the Spirit," "the eschatological prophet," and the Messianic deliverer prophesied throughout Isaiah. Furthermore, noting the possible connections between Isaiah 61 and the servant songs, he claims that Christ is also associated with the role of the Suffering Servant.<sup>131</sup> Finally, through his combination of the social justice discussion of Isaiah 58 and the eschatological deliverance of Isaiah 61, Christ claims that he will bring about the people of God's deliverance both physically and spiritually.

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<sup>129</sup> Bock, BECNT, 410; Green, 212; Marshall, 184.

<sup>130</sup> The sequence of events in 4:21 form a chiasm with the actions described in 4:16-17 (Stein, 157).

Stood up (A)  
    Was handed (B)  
        Unrolled (C)  
            Rolled (c)  
        Gave back (b)  
Sat Down (a)

<sup>131</sup> Liefeld, 867.



### *Reaction of those Listening (4:22)*

Upon initial examination of the response of those listening, it appears that they accept what Christ has just said. They appear to both speak well of him and marvel at what he has just said. However, due to the scathing criticisms Christ delivers following their response and their final reaction demanding his death, this appears to form a contradiction. In order to solve this issue, a variety of theories have been proposed. One suggestion is that this represents Luke's unskillful combination of two sources or even events to form his narration. However, this suggestion is overly skeptical, for the situation can be explained by the text itself.<sup>132</sup> Another theory argues that the terms generally used to refer to a positive judgment can also be used to refer to a negative judgment. With the first judgment, μαρτυρεω, followed by a dative, it can be taken as either "to praise" (with a dative of advantage) or "to bear witness against" (with a dative of disadvantage). Furthermore, θαυμάζω can refer to either admiration or opposition. Because of this ambiguity, Marshall concludes that these terms should be taken in their negative sense to remove the awkward transition from positive judgment to outright rejection in 4:22.<sup>133</sup> Thus the congregation is taken to have rejected Christ all along. However, due to Luke's tendency to use these terms positively through Luke-Acts<sup>134</sup> and the reference to "words of grace,"<sup>135</sup> this theory, though possible, appears unlikely. One final theory maintains the positive nuance of the terms denoting the crowd's response but notes that this positive response is not directed to the content of the message but to the

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<sup>132</sup> Bock, BECNT, 413.

<sup>133</sup> Marshall, 185-186.

<sup>134</sup> Stein, 157.

<sup>135</sup> Bock, BECNT, 413.

retorical style in which it is given. Combined with the questioning of Jesus' heritage, it appears that the crowds were amazed by the rhetoric of the exposition but remain skeptical because of Christ's lowly origin.<sup>136</sup> Based on the evidence given, the latter theory appears as the most likely.

#### *Jesus' Criticism and His Near Execution (4:23-27)*

To respond to the rejection of his message, Jesus uses two proverbial expressions and two examples from Israel's history to not only criticize their reaction but also to expand his mission beyond the boundaries of the people of Israel. The first of these proverbs relates Jesus' refusal to perform miraculous signs to prove himself as the anointed one. Through the citation of a common proverb, "Physician, heal yourself," combined with the reference to what Christ has done in Capernaum, it is possible that Christ is condemning a form of regional jealousy in response to Christ's miraculous signs in other locations rather than in Nazareth.<sup>137</sup> However, it is difficult to take "yourself" as referring to any specific locale. Thus, it appears more likely that the people are demanding that Christ do signs in order to prove his authority because they know he comes from humble beginnings.<sup>138</sup> Christ's reaction to their skepticism is furthered by the following proverb detailing a prophet's rejection in his hometown (v. 24). Finally, Christ completes his criticism with two examples from the Old Testament, the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17) and Naaman (2 Kings 5), that illustrate Gentile salvation during Israelite judgment. With this reference, Christ associates the unbelief of the people of

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 414-415.

<sup>137</sup> Green, 216.

<sup>138</sup> Bock, BECNT, 415-416; Nolland, 199-200.

Nazareth with these great periods of apostasy and suggests that perhaps Gentiles who are outside of the covenant are more worthy of deliverance than they are.<sup>139</sup>

Following Christ's criticism, the people of Nazareth are enraged and seek to kill Jesus by throwing him off a cliff outside the city. This action most likely represents their intention to execute Jesus as a false prophet by stoning following Deuteronomy 13:5-10.<sup>140</sup> However, Jesus escapes to continue his ministry elsewhere (v. 30).

#### *Development of Jubilee in Luke 4:14-30*

Within the sermon in the synagogue, Jesus cites the promises of Isaiah 61, including the establishment of the year of the Lord's favor, linking this passage with the deliverance themes of Isaiah 61 and the original Jubilee legislation of Leviticus 25. However, within the mission of Christ, the theme of Jubilee has now been expanded from its original economic implications in Leviticus 25 and its place in the restoration of Israel from exile in Isaiah 61 to describe Christ's bringing of both a physical and spiritual release, forgiveness of sins, as part of the kingdom of God. Furthermore, this act of release will fully include the Gentiles as a part of God's plan of redemption.

#### *Conclusion*

Through this sermon, Christ identifies himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah's promise in Isaiah 61 given so many centuries ago. He is the anointed figure who will bring about the promised restoration including the release of the oppressed and establishment of the year of the Lord's favor (the Year of Jubilee). As indicated by Christ's citation in Luke 4 and his ministry throughout the rest of Luke, this release will include both a spiritual deliverance from sin and a physical deliverance from oppression

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<sup>139</sup> Bock, NIVAC, 138.

<sup>140</sup> Bock, BECNT, 419.

and suffering. Thus, Christ and his kingdom are the ultimate answer to Yahweh's demands for social justice.

## **Conclusion**

The texts studied represent a narrative development of the theme of Jubilee. In Leviticus 25, the Israelites are given legislation that largely serves to guard against oppression of the weak by the powerful. However, as evidenced by the surrounding context of Isaiah 61 (specifically Is 58), Israel in large part fails to maintain these practices of justice. Therefore, for their lack of justice, along with other sins, Yahweh punishes them and sends them into exile. Nevertheless, Yahweh promises restoration for Israel through the sending of his anointed whose mission will include the establishment of justice through the bringing of the year of the Lord's favor. As described by the New Testament, Christ appears as the fulfillment of this messianic promise. His kingdom will include both the spiritual deliverance of those oppressed by sin and the establishment of justice for those who are socially oppressed. Furthermore, this kingdom will not be restricted to a particular ethnic group but will be open to all people who accept the deliverance offered through Christ.

As a whole, these passages teach that God loves justice and demands it of his people. Furthermore, the establishment of the kingdom of God, whether through the nation of Israel or through the Messianic kingdom, has always included and will always include a mandate for the deliverance of the oppressed and protection for those who are weak and vulnerable. Finally, as believers, seeking to imitate Christ and take part in his kingdom mission in the world, Christians must pursue justice for the oppressed if they are to match the mission of Christ. However, it is important to note the twofold deliverance

presented in the kingdom of God, physical and spiritual. Therefore, believers should seek to deliver the oppressed through the transformative power of the Gospel, leading to the forgiveness of sins, combined with care for those in need and the mission to bring justice to those who are oppressed. These two concepts are inseparable as both are essential parts to Christ's mission and the establishment of his kingdom through his followers. Any attempt to divorce either concept from its companion will result in an incomplete presentation of the Gospel or a temporary solution to oppression. With this dual purpose, believers will accomplish the full mission of the kingdom of God presented not only in Luke 4 but also in Leviticus 25 and Isaiah 61.

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